



Smithsonian

Archives of American Art

A Finding Aid to the L. Brent Kington Papers, 1944-2012, in the Archives of American Art

Stephanie Ashley and Erin Corley

2002, 2005

Archives of American Art
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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives of American Art
Title:	L. Brent Kington papers
Identifier:	AAA.kinglbre
Date:	1944-2012
Creator:	Kington, L. Brent (Louis Brent), 1934-2013
Extent:	9 Linear feet
Language:	English .
Summary:	<p>The papers of influential blacksmith, sculptor, metalsmith and educator, L. Brent Kington, measure 9 linear feet and date from 1944 to 2012. The collection provides a valuable overview of Kington's career through correspondence relating primarily to exhibitions, subject files, drawings, photographs of Kington and his artwork, printed matter and audiovisual material. An additional 5.2 linear feet of papers was accessioned from 2007 to 2012 and remains unprocessed.</p>

Administrative Information

Provenance

The collection was donated to the Archives of American Art in installments by L. Brent Kington from 2001 to 2012. Materials donated from 2007 to 2012 remain unprocessed.

Related Material

The Archives also has a transcribed interview of L. Brent Kington, conducted May 3-4, 2001 by Mary Douglas for the Archives of American Art's Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America. The interview was conducted in Kington's home and studio in Makando, Illinois.

Processing Information

The collection was processed by Stephanie Ashley in November 2002, and by Erin Corley in June 2005, with funding provided by the Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America. An additional 5.2 linear feet was accessioned from 2007 to 2012 and remains unprocessed.

Preferred Citation

L. Brent Kington papers, 1944-2012. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Restrictions on Access

The collection is open for research. Use requires an appointment and is limited to the Washington, D.C. research facility.

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Biographical Note

L. Brent Kington was born in Topeka, Kansas, in 1934. He received a BFA from the University of Kansas, Lawrence, in 1957 and an MFA from Cranbrook Academy of Art in 1961. Kington began his career primarily as a silversmith working with small-scale objects such as jewelry, silverware, and toys, and then became interested in using forged iron to create sculpture. He sought the help and instruction of the few blacksmiths he could find working in a "traditional" style and began working with large-scale sculptures forged in iron and steel, weathervanes, and other kinetic sculpture. Kington's subsequent research, such as his exploration of forge welding techniques of iron and his experimentation with laminated, non-ferrous alloys, constituted an important contribution to the resurgence of traditional blacksmithing and was highly influential in the fields of blacksmithing and metalsmithing in general.

Kington served as Director of the School of Art and Design at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale from 1981 to 1994. He was a lecturer at SIU from 1961 to 1962, assistant professor from 1962 to 1967, associate professor from 1967 to 1972, professor from 1972 to 1996, and is currently professor emeritus. A committed educator and an avid spokesman for the arts, he has been honored many times as a guest lecturer, visiting artist, exhibit juror, workshop demonstrator, and panelist in the United States and abroad. In 1987 he spent a summer in Cortona, Italy as guest professor in the University of Georgia Studies Abroad Program.

Since 1962, Kington's sculpture and metalwork has been shown in more than 350 group and solo exhibitions in museums and galleries throughout the United States, Europe, Asia, Africa, Canada, Mexico, and South America. Over the years Kington has served in various professional organizations. He has been a Trustee of the American Craft Council, Director of the Artist-Blacksmith Association of North America (ABANA), and President of the Society of North American Goldsmiths (SNAG). In 1978 he was elected to the American Craft Council's Academy of Fellows and has been the recipient of two Artist Fellowship grants from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Kington continues to work from his home and studio in Makando, Illinois.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of influential blacksmith, sculptor, metalsmith, and educator, L. Brent Kington, measure 9 linear feet and date from 1944 to 2012. The collection provides a valuable overview of Kington's career through correspondence, subject files, drawings, photographs of Kington and his artwork, printed matter and audiovisual material.

Correspondence in Series 1 relates primarily to exhibitions in the United States at institutions such as the the American Craft Museum, the Evansville Museum of Arts and Science, and the National Ornamental Metal Museum, in which Kington's work was represented.

Kington's education at Cranbrook Academy of Art, his career at Southern Illinois University, his involvement with various professional organizations, his appearances at conferences and workshops, and his relationships with individual galleries, are more fully represented in Series 2: Subject Files.

The collection also includes printed matter, including exhibition announcements and catalogs for group and solo exhibitions in which Kington's work was featured, and publications containing articles about Kington.

Photographs in the collection include images of Kington's artwork and also picture Kington at various stages throughout his career. Audiovisual material includes an oral history interview with Kington from 2001, and two video recordings of a blacksmith workshop and a program entitled *Brent Kington: Image of an Artist*.

An additional 5.2 linear feet of papers was accessioned from 2007 to 2012 and remains unprocessed.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into six series. Original arrangement has generally been maintained throughout the collection, with some merging of chronological correspondence in Series 1 to facilitate access.

Missing Title:

- Series 1: Correspondence, 1955-2004, undated (box 1; 0.8 linear ft.)
- Series 2: Subject Files, 1956-2005, undated (box 1-3; 1.6 linear ft.)
- Series 3: Printed Material, 1952-2003, undated (box 3-4, OV 5; 0.9 linear ft.)
- Series 4: Photographs, circa 1944-2001 (box 4; 0.4 linear ft.)
- Series 5: Audiovisual Material, 1982, 2001, undated (box 4; 4 items)
- Series 6: Unprocessed Addition to the L. Brent Kington Papers, 1956-2012 (boxes 6-12, OV 13; 5.2 linear ft.)

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

Art metal-work -- Study and teaching
Art metal-workers
Blacksmithing
Blacksmiths -- Illinois
Sculptors -- Illinois

Types of Materials:

Interviews
Photographs
Sketches
Slides (photographs)
Sound recordings
Video recordings

Names:

American Craft Council
Artist-Blacksmith's Association of North America
Cranbrook Academy of Art -- Students
Hsu, Ilin
Nanette L. Laitman Documentation Project for Craft and Decorative Arts in America
Society of North American Goldsmiths
Southern Illinois University at Carbondale -- Faculty
Yellin, Samuel, 1885-1940

Container Listing

Series 1: Correspondence, 1955-2004, undated

(box 1; 0.8 linear ft.)

Scope and Contents: Correspondence in this series relates primarily to exhibitions in which Kington's work was represented. Records include invitations to participate in the exhibitions and Kington's responses, details about artwork selected, general arrangements for the shows, documentation of resulting sales, and occasionally, related printed material such as announcements, catalogs and news clippings. Researchers should note that additional records relating to any of the subjects discussed in the correspondence may be found in Series 2: Subject Files.

The museums, institutions and exhibitions represented in the correspondence include the following:

- American Craft Museum: *The American Craftsman* (1964), *Craftsmen U.S.A.* (1966), a one-man exhibition (1969), *Jewelry USA* (1984), and *American Jewelry Now* (1985)
- Contemporary Crafts Association, Contemporary Crafts Gallery in Portland, Oregon: *50th Anniversary Exhibition* (1987)
- Evansville Museum of Arts and Science at Southern Illinois University: *Mid-States Art Exhibition* (1979, 1993), and the Third Biennial Exhibition (1992)
- Louisville Art Gallery: *Contemporary Iron '87* (1987)
- Mitchell Museum in Mt. Vernon, Illinois: *Jewelry and Beyond* (1984)
- National Ornamental Metal Museum: one-man show (1983), *Repair Days Reunion* (1992), *Lifetime Achievements: The American Craft Council College of Fellows in Metal* (1993), *The Blacksmithing Craft Continuum* (1993-1994), *All In Good Fun: Toys by Metalsmiths* (1999), and *Wind and Whimsy: Weathervanes and Whirligigs* (2001)
- Philbrook Museum of Art: *The Eloquent Object* (1988)
- Southern Illinois University Museum: *Brent Kington: A Retrospective*, (1992)

Correspondence found here also documents matters such as requests to reproduce photographs of Kington's works in publications, information about meetings, exhibitions and other events, and letters concerning the award of fellowships and grants. There is also general correspondence from people interested in Kington's work, such as Margo Baumeler (1980) and Arthur Magill (1980).

The series contains several individual items of particular note. Correspondence relating to the 1966 Pratt Institute's *Third International Miniature Print Exhibit* includes a signed and numbered print by Kington entitled *Self* (1 of 15, 2/18/66). A 1984 letter to Ed Bachrach includes a sketch of a weathervane, and 1989 correspondence relating to a National Ornamental Metal Museum project to provide sculpture for the Memphis Botanic Gardens includes a sketch of Kington's proposed piece. The 1997-1998 correspondence folder contains copies of sketches for an exhibition of collaborative work by Brent Kington and his son, Tod, at the SNAG conference in St. Louis.

Arrangement: In the original arrangement correspondence was generally arranged in reverse chronological order with letters frequently attached to related correspondence going back several months or years. To preserve the relationship between such documents they have been left together and are arranged in reverse chronological order and filed in the folder corresponding to the primary date (i.e., the date of the first and most recent paper in the group). Researchers should be aware that date ranges provided on folders refer to the

primary dates of documents contained therein and that some items in the folder may predate that range.

To facilitate access some correspondence that was originally separated but which overlapped chronologically has been merged.

Box 1, Folder 1-26 Correspondence, 1955-2004, undated

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Series 2: Subject Files, 1956-2005, undated

(box 1-3; 1.6 linear ft.)

Scope and Contents: This series provides subject access to records concerning specific aspects of Kington's career. As in Series 1, the majority of the records found here are correspondence and researchers should note that supplementary material relating to any of these subjects may be found in Series 1.

Three folders of material relating to Kington's education at Cranbrook Academy of Art contain photographs of artwork by Kington including images of a commission for the Detroit auto show, furniture designs, silverware, and jewelry. Of particular note are several color sketches of jewelry designs done by Kington during his time at Cranbrook.

The series documents Kington's involvement with various professional organizations such as the American Craft Council (ACC), and the Society of North American Goldsmiths (SNAG). ACC records include information regarding annual award ceremonies and symposiums, and various awards bestowed on Kington by the organization. SNAG records including minutes of the forming executive committee meetings and information about the founding of the society and annual conferences.

Kington's career as an educator is also documented here through records of arrangements for his conference presentations, his activities as a juror and a visiting artist at various institutions and craft schools, and his administrative and faculty duties as a professor at Southern Illinois University. The folder concerning the Penland School of Crafts, in which Kington participated in 1971, includes Kington's answers to a questionnaire which provide insight into his attitudes towards such opportunities to work alongside other artists.

Letters to Kington from SIU alumni, such as Elizabeth Y. Akamatsu, Phillip Baldwin, Jan Brooks, Harlan W. Butt, Stephen Miller, Noellyn Popos, Rachelle Thiewes and Claudia Widdis, can also be found in this series in addition to postcards from Phillip Baldwin, Robert Ebendorf, Glen Gardner, Paula Garrett, Mary Lee Hu, Arthur Johns, Liza Littlefield, Kris Patzlaff, Sarah Perkins, Mary Ann and Sam Scherr, Jim Wallace and others.

Consignments and sales of Kington's work at galleries such as J.J. Klejman, and The Sculptors Gallery, as well as his relationships with Lee Nordness Galleries, Gilman Galleries, and Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery during the 1960s, are also documented here. Records relating to Lee Nordness Galleries concern the gallery's interest in Kington's works as Nordness expanded his interest in contemporary American objects by "master craftsmen." This material also deals briefly with Kington's representation in the *Objects USA* crafts exhibition which opened at the Smithsonian Institution in 1969. Records relating to the Theo Portnoy Gallery document Kington's exhibition, *The Weathervane: A Kinetic Form* (1978), as well as other consignments and sales through the gallery from 1977 to 1981.

The series also includes a résumé, with a career summary and an artist statement. A folder of material on the Second International Seminar on Craft Art and Religion includes three photographs of Kington and other attendees.

Arrangement: Files are arranged alphabetically by subject using the basic arrangement supplied by Kington. In some cases, files have been further broken down and subject headings have been adapted for clarification and ease of access.

Box 1, Folder 27 America House, 1962-1967

Box 1, Folder 28-30 American Craft Council, 1956-2005

Box 1, Folder 31 Articles, Papers and Statements, by and about Kington, 1971-1993

Box 1, Folder 32	Artist-Blacksmith's Association of North America, 1972-2000, undated
Box 2, Folder 1	Auction Gifts and Donations, 1981-2004
Box 2, Folder 2	Biographical Cartoons, circa 2004
Box 2, Folder 3-6	Conference Presentations, Juror and Visiting Artist, 1962-2003, undated
Box 2	Consignments and Sales
Box 2, Folder 7	A-Z, circa 1962-1968
Box 2, Folder 8	The Bell Gallery, 1984-1988
Box 2, Folder 9	J. J. Klejman, 1967-1968
Box 2, Folder 10	The Sculptors Gallery, 1965-1968, undated
Box 2, Folder 11	University of Nebraska, 1964-1966, undated
Box 2	Craft Schools, 1971-1987
Box 2, Folder 12	A-Z, 1978-2003
Box 2, Folder 13	Appalachian Center for Crafts (Tennessee Crafts Center), 1974-2000
Box 2, Folder 14	Kentucky School of Craft, 1999-2004
Box 2, Folder 15	Penland School of Crafts, 1971, 1999-2004
Box 2	Cranbrook Academy of Art
Box 2, Folder 16	Drawings, 1960-1961
Box 2, Folder 17-18	Photographs of Artwork, circa 1959-1963
Box 2, Folder 19	Printed Material, 1959-1966
Box 2, Folder 20	Exhibition Notification Cards, 1963-1969, undated
Box 2, Folder 21	Gilman Galleries, Inc., 1966-1969, undated
Box 2, Folder 22	Lee Nordness Galleries, 1963-1969, 1977, undated
Box 2, Folder 23	National Endowment for the Arts , 1981
Box 2, Folder 24-25	National Ornamental Metal Museum , 1982-2004

Box 2, Folder 26-28	Postcards, 1982-2004, undated
Box 2, Folder 29	Résumé, 2000-2001
Box 2, Folder 30-31	Second International Seminar on Craft, Art and Religion, 1978
Box 2, Folder 32	Society of North American Goldsmiths (SNAG), 1968-1999
Box 2	Southern Illinois University
Box 2, Folder 33-34	Administrative and Faculty Duties, 1962-1993
Box 3, Folder 1-2	Alumni Letters, 1982-2003, undated
Box 3, Folder 3	Alumni List, 2000, undated
Box 3, Folder 4	Alumni Photograph at 20 Years of Metal Exhibition Opening, 1982
Box 3, Folder 5	Award Nominations, 1975-1990
Box 3, Folder 6	Blacksmith's Workshop Photographs, 1978 Notes: (includes photographs of Kington, Tom Bredlow and Francis Whitaker)
Box 3, Folder 7	Brent Kington Metalsmith Scholarship Endowment Fund, 1997-2004
Box 3, Folder 8-10	L. Brent Kington Smithy, 2003-2004
Box 3, Folder 11	Technical Papers (not by Kington), 1961, 1966, 1978, undated
Box 3, Folder 12	Technical Paper, The Patronizing of Copper Alloys (by Kington?), undated
Box 3, Folder 13	Theo Portnoy Gallery, 1977-1981

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Series 3: Printed Material, 1952-2004, undated

(box 3-4, OV 5; 0.9 linear ft.)

Scope and Contents: This series contains exhibition announcements and catalogs for some of Kington's solo exhibitions and for group exhibitions in which he participated. There are also news clippings and publications featuring Kington and his work, including *American Craft* and *Metalsmith*, as well as miscellaneous printed material collected by Kington.

Miscellaneous printed material for 1971 includes a letter from Harvey Z. Yellin enclosing two publications regarding his father, Samuel Yellin, with an inventory of Yellin's antique iron collection.

Box 3	Exhibition Announcements and Catalogs
Box 3, Folder 14-23	Group Exhibitions Featuring Kington, 1961-2003, undated
Box 3, Folder 24	Kington Exhibitions, 1967-1992
Box 3, Folder 25-29	Miscellaneous Printed Material, 1965-2004, undated
Box 4, Folder 1-2	News Clippings (see also OV 5), 1952-2004, undated
Box 4, Folder 3-5	Publications Featuring Kington, 1965, 1977-2004
Box OV 5	Oversized News Clippings, 1964-1978

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Series 4: Photographs, 1944-2001

(box 4; 0.4 linear ft.)

Scope and Contents: Unless otherwise noted, the photographs found in this series are prints, primarily black and white, with several color photographs. In addition to photographs of artwork, this series includes photographs of Kington throughout his career (several including Tod Kington), and Kingon's studio. There are also photographs of a 1970 blacksmith workshop picturing Kington and others including Alex Bealer, Michael Croft, Fred Fenster, Bill Freeman, Nilda Getty, Mike Jerry, Stanley Lechtzin, Richard Mawdsley, Ronald Pearson, and J. Fred Woell. Also found is a photograph of jeweler, Clyde Curtis, with whom Kington had a six month internship. Additional photographs can be found in Series 2: Subject Files.

Box 4, Folder 6	Photographs of Blacksmith Workshop, 1970
Box 4, Folder 7-8	Photographs of Kington, 1944-2000
Box 4, Folder 9	Photographs of Kington, Studios and Workshops (slides), 1970-1988
Box 4	Photographs of Artwork
Box 4, Folder 10	Icarus, circa 1978-1982
Box 4, Folder 11	Knapp Portrait, 1978-1980
Box 4, Folder 12	Untitled, circa 1969-1979
Box 4, Folder 13-16	Various, 1960-1983, undated
Box 4, Folder 17-19	Various (slides), circa 1963-2001
Box 4, Folder 20	Weathervanes, circa 1969-1987
Box 4, Folder 21	Photograph of Clyde Curtis, 1956-1957

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Series 5: Audiovisual Material, 1982, 2001, undated

(box 4; 4 items)

Scope and Contents: This series includes a compact disk of an oral history interview of Kington conducted by Ilin Hsu in 2001. Correspondence between Ilin Hsu and Kington relating to the recording of the interview can be found in Series 1: Correspondence, 2001. There are also two copies of a VHS videocassette of blacksmith workshop at Southern Illinois University, and a VHS videocassette of a program, *Brent Kington: Image of an Artist*, recorded in 1982.

Box 4, Folder 22 Audio CD, An Interview with L. Brent Kington by Ilin Hsu, Tyler School of Art, Temple University, 2001

Box 4, Folder 23 VHS Videocassettes, Blacksmith Workshop, Southern Illinois University, undated

Box 4, Folder 24 VHS Videocassette, Brent Kington: Image of an Artist, July 12, 1982

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Series 6: Unprocessed Addition to the L. Brent Kington Papers , 1956-2012

5.2 Linear feet (boxes 6-12, OV 13)

Scope and Contents: The addition was accessioned from 2007 to 2012 and includes an interview with Kington, personal and professional correspondence, photographs of Kington, his colleagues and his artwork (many on DC), works of art, subject files on Kington's affiliation with art organizations, advisory councils and workshops, exhibition and project files, teaching files, scrapbooks, printed material and audio visual material including produced documentaries about Kington on DVD.

Box 6	Unprocessed Addition, 1956-2012
Box 7	Unprocessed Addition, 1956-2012
Box 8	Unprocessed Addition, 1956-2012
Box 9	Unprocessed Addition, 1956-2012
Box 10	Unprocessed Addition, 1956-2012
Box 11	Unprocessed Addition, 1956-2012
Box OV 12	Oversize Unprocessed Addition, 1956-2012

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